

DoD INFLUENZA SURVEILLANCE PROGRAM

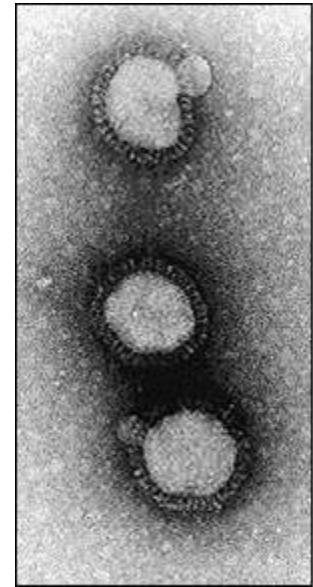
PATIENT INFORMATION SHEET

Influenza: The Disease

Influenza, also known as the flu, is a contagious disease that is caused by the influenza virus. It attacks the respiratory tract in humans (nose, throat, and lungs). The flu is different from a cold. Influenza usually comes on suddenly and may include these symptoms:

- Fever
- Headache
- Tiredness (can be extreme)
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Nasal congestion
- Body aches

These symptoms are usually referred to as "flu-like symptoms." Influenza in the U.S. usually occurs during the months from October to April, the "flu season".



Influenza Viruses

Anyone Can Get the Flu, But the Disease Is More Severe for Some People

Most people who get influenza will recover in 1 to 2 weeks, but some people will develop life-threatening complications (such as pneumonia) as a result of the flu. Millions of people in the United States — about 10% to 20% of U.S. residents — will get influenza each year. An average of about 36,000 people per year in the United States die from influenza, and 114,000 per year have to be admitted to the hospital as a result of influenza. Anyone can get the flu (even healthy people), and serious problems from influenza can happen at any age. People age 65 years and older, people of any age with chronic medical conditions, and very young children are more likely to get complications from influenza. Pneumonia, bronchitis, and sinus and ear infections are three examples of complications from flu. The flu can make chronic health problems worse. For example, people with asthma may experience asthma attacks while they have the flu, and people with chronic congestive heart failure may have worsening of this condition that is triggered by the flu.

How the Influenza Virus Is Passed Around

The flu is spread, or transmitted, when a person who has the flu coughs, sneezes, or speaks and sends flu virus into the air, and other people inhale the virus. The virus enters the nose, throat, or lungs of a person and begins to multiply, causing symptoms of influenza.

Influenza may, less often, be spread when a person touches a surface that has flu viruses on it – a door handle, for instance – and then touches his or her nose or mouth.

The Flu Is Contagious

A person can spread the flu starting 1 day before he or she feels sick. Adults can continue to pass the flu virus to others for another 3 to 7 days after symptoms start. Children can pass the virus for longer than 7 days. Symptoms start 1 to 4 days after the virus enters the body. Some persons can be infected with the flu virus but have no symptoms. During this time, those persons can still spread the virus to others.



1918 Flu Patient

How Do We Prevent the Flu? (We need your help!)

There are two ways the DoD Global Influenza Surveillance Program can help prevent the flu: by testing people who might have the flu, and by making sure the flu vaccine protects against the flu.

By taking samples from patients who have flu-like illnesses, we can find out what viruses are being spread in the community. If many of the viruses are influenza viruses, we can start an aggressive vaccination program to stop others from getting ill.

Viruses like the flu virus grow more slowly in the lab than in your body, so the results we get from your sample probably won't help you personally get over your illness. Getting tested may not help you directly, but ***it definitely helps your community and your country.***

Every year there is a new flu vaccine. The viruses that make up the vaccine are based on the viruses that are collected the previous year by U.S. and worldwide influenza surveillance programs. The US Department of Defense is an important part of that network because we are stationed and travel to hundreds of countries every year, where we can come into contact with all sorts of diseases, including flu. *The specimen you contribute today could affect next year's flu vaccine!*

The Myth of the "Stomach Flu"

Many people use the term "stomach flu" to describe illnesses with nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea. These symptoms can be caused by many different viruses, bacteria, or even parasites. While vomiting, diarrhea, and being nauseous or "sick to your stomach" can sometimes be related to the flu — particularly in children — these problems are rarely the main symptoms of influenza. The flu is a respiratory disease and not a stomach or intestinal disease.

What You Should Do If You Get the Flu

- Rest
- Drink plenty of liquids
- Avoid using alcohol and tobacco
- Take medication to relieve the symptoms of flu

Influenza is caused by a virus, so antibiotics (like penicillin) don't work to cure it. The best way to prevent the flu is to get an influenza vaccine (flu shot) each fall, before flu season.

Do Not Give Aspirin To a Child or Teenager Who Has the Flu

Never give aspirin to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms – and particularly fever – without first speaking to your doctor. Giving aspirin to children and teenagers who have influenza can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye's syndrome. Children or teenagers with the flu should get plenty of rest, drink lots of liquids, and take medicines that contain *no aspirin* to relieve symptoms.

Wash Your Hands!

Last, but not least: **Wash Your Hands!** Every time you touch a doorknob, handle, water fountain button etc., you come into contact with common sources of germ spread. So keep your hands clean and you can stay well.

Sources: The majority of this handout is from the CDC's Influenza Information Sheet found at (<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/flu/fluinfo.htm>).